

**Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan  
Emergency Support Function # 15**

**Emergency Support Function – No. 15  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**Primary Agency:**

Department of Emergency Management  
(VDEM)

**Support Agencies and Organizations:**

- Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
- Department of Fire Programs (VDFP)
- Department of Health (VDH)
- Department of Military Affairs (DMA)
- Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)
- Department of Social Services (VDSS)
- Department of Transportation (VDOT)
- Virginia National Guard (VANG)
- Virginia State Police (VSP)
- Other agencies and organizations as needed

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**Introduction**

**Purpose**

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 – External Affairs, ensures that sufficient assets are deployed during a potential or actual incident to provide accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected audiences, including state agencies and local governments, elected officials, media, the private sector, and the local populace.

**Scope**

ESF #15 coordinates actions to provide the required external affairs support to state and local government incident management operational elements. ESF #15 applies to all state agencies that may require public affairs support or whose public affairs assets may be employed during an incident.

The provisions of this annex apply to incidents where significant interagency coordination is required. ESF #15 is organized into the following functional components: Joint Information Center, Virginia Public Inquiry Center, Community Relations, and Legislative Liaison.

**Policies**

State planning or preparedness for external affairs functions recognizes local government responsibilities for providing information to their citizens. Nothing in this document should be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities. In the event that a local government is unable to or lacks the capability to perform these responsibilities, the state may coordinate with the impacted local government to provide vital health and safety information to the affected population.

**Mission**

The mission of the ESF #15 is: (1) to make the public aware of potential emergency situations and of appropriate protective actions, (2) to keep the public informed about an ongoing emergency or disaster situation and to provide protective action guidance as appropriate and (3) to keep public officials, including elected officials, informed of the processes of coordinating the response to and facilitating the recovery from emergencies and disasters.

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### **Organization**

- A. During normal operations, the VDEM Public Information Officer (PIO) coordinates with the news media, localities, and others as needed to promote emergency preparedness. During emergencies and disasters, the PIO is the External Affairs Officer.
- B. During an emergency or disaster situation, the PIO is responsible for establishing and coordinating a central Joint Information Center (JIC) at the state level for receiving and disseminating information to the public. Designated state agencies will be asked to provide qualified personnel to augment the staff at the JIC. The PIO will report directly to the State Coordinating Officer.
- C. In the event of a substantial disaster, which would trigger a Presidential Declaration, the PIO will work with federal personnel to expand the JIC to include federal staff.
- D. The PIO will be responsible for establishing and managing the Virginia Public Inquiry Center (VPIC) to facilitate the direct dissemination of information to the public.
- E. The PIO will be responsible for the Legislative Liaison function to facilitate the dissemination of information to elected officials.
- F. The PIO will be responsible for the Community Relations function to facilitate disaster victims' access to disaster assistance.
- G. In a JFO, the PIO will manage the External Affairs section that includes the JIC, community relations and legislative liaison functions. The PIO will report directly to the State Coordinating Officer (SCO).

### **Concept of Operations**

- A. During normal operations, the PIO will implement a public education and awareness program with realistic and measurable objectives. Local governments will be encouraged and assisted to make the public aware of potential hazards and of appropriate protective measures.
- B. In time of emergency, the PIO will coordinate the release of information on emergencies and disasters at the state level when they occur. The PIO will coordinate all such information with the Governor's Press Secretary, the Secretary of Public Safety, other state agencies, the federal government, local governments, and volunteer organizations. Other designated state agencies will provide qualified professional personnel to assist, as requested.
- C. When a disaster is impending or occurs, the augmented External Affairs staff will be positioned in the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC), which has a designated area equipped for this function. The staff may also be asked to supplement local government PIO efforts or to provide PIO support in the field at the disaster site.
- D. If the disaster warrants a Presidential Declaration, the augmented External Affairs staff will then co-locate with other state and federal response personnel to a Joint Field Office (JFO) when that site is activated. The PIO will ensure coordination with federal personnel and form a Joint Information Center (JIC) operating in the JFO. State External Affairs personnel will be used to assist local PIO efforts in such situations.

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**E. Emergency Alert System (EAS)**

1. The Virginia Emergency Alert System (EAS) is an established medium for the receipt and/or distribution of emergency information to the general public at the local, state, and national levels.
2. Authority for the EAS comes by way of Chapter I of the Code of Federal Regulations, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as it pertains to day-to-day emergency operations.
3. The VDEM is designated as the official clearing house for all state-level and statewide activations. VDEM will make the final determination for all requests of the EAS activations. It is also recommended, but not required, that all requests for activation of the EAS from the Governor's Office and other state agencies be accomplished through VDEM in order to expedite activation, avoid any confusion, and ensure that the proper protocol and procedures are implemented and followed.
4. Activation of EAS is accomplished through the VEOC whose personnel, along with the PIO, are part of the Local Area Communications Committee.
5. The purpose of the EAS is twofold: First, to allow the President of the United States to gain access automatically to the nation's broadcast facilities and to speak directly to the country in times of national disaster. Second, the EAS can be used by the National Weather Service and state and local-level officials to disseminate other types of emergency information.

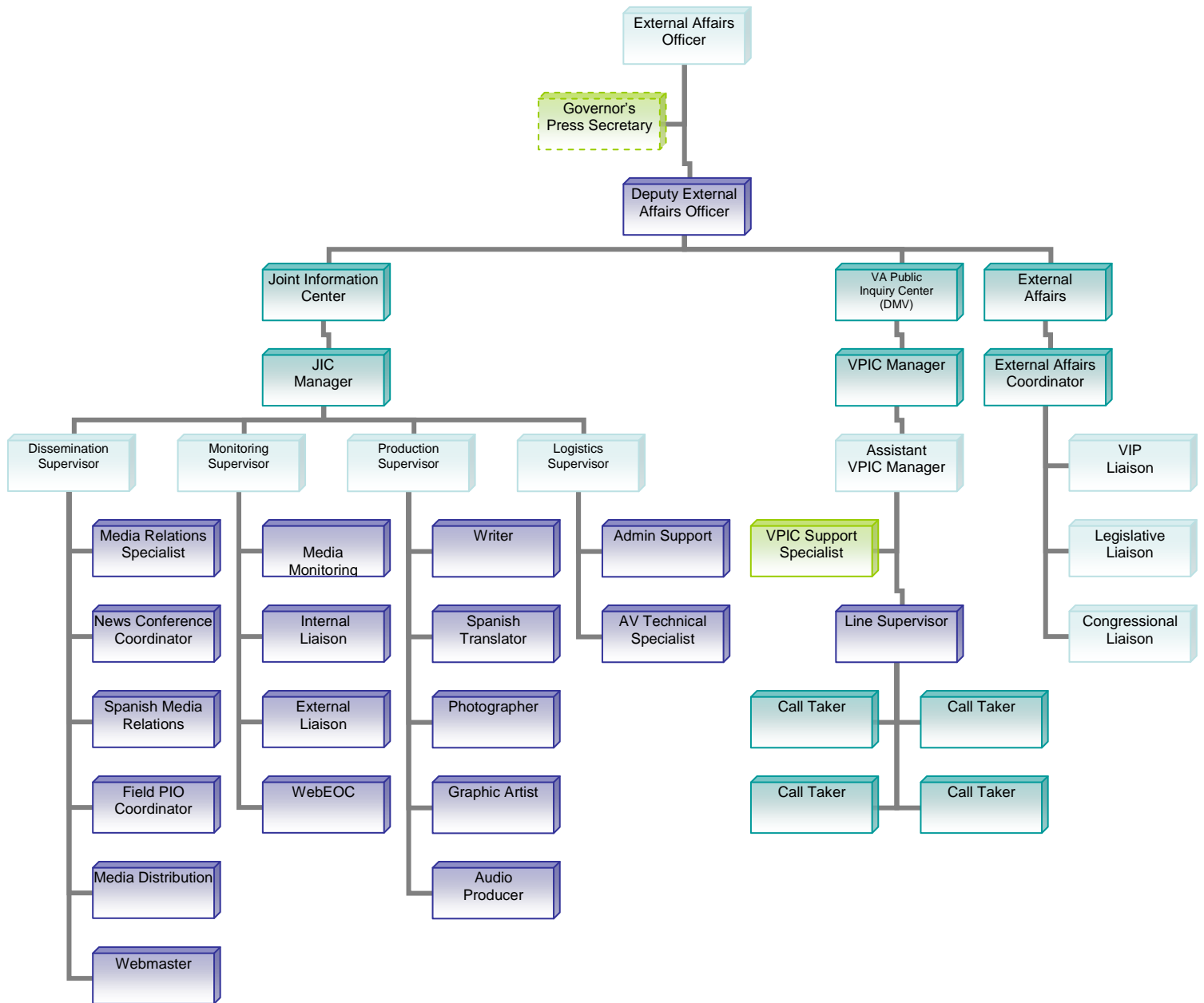
6. Certain local officials are authorized to directly access the EAS to disseminate emergency information in their area.

- F. If an incident has the potential for statewide impact, the PIO may activate the VPIC to manage a large number of phone calls and email messages from the public. The VPIC will be managed according to the *Virginia Public Inquiry Plan* developed and maintained by the PIO. The VPIC will have access to accurate and timely information to disseminate to the public.
- G. During response operations, the PIO will designate a Legislative Liaison to make contact with the state and federal legislators who represent impacted cities and counties. As response operations move into recovery operations, the Legislative Liaison will coordinate with the federal Congressional Liaison, the Office of the Governor, and the state staff in the JFO to keep elected officials informed of recovery efforts.
- H. In a JFO, the External Affairs section will include the JIC, the Community Relations section and the Legislative Liaison. The PIO will manage the section and report directly to the SCO.
- I. The Community Relations (CR) section is responsible for facilitating the implementation of the federal/state disaster assistance programs in the disaster area. CR deploys a federal/state team to each city and county designated under the disaster declaration. CR ensures that local officials and local citizens are aware of the availability of assistance and have access to apply for the benefits for which they may be eligible.

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External Affairs Organization



**Section 1: Virginia Public Inquiry Center (VPIC)**

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**Mission**

The mission of the VPIC is to provide a single point of contact for the general public to call and receive current and accurate information regarding a specific event or threat. The state government will provide this information.

**Organization**

- A. The VPIC is a combined effort of several state agencies under the leadership of VDEM. A VPIC Coordinating Committee, with representatives from VDEM, Department of Motor Vehicles, and Department of Health will develop policies and procedures for the VPIC.
- B. During an emergency or disaster situation, the VDEM Public Affairs Office is responsible for determining the need for a public inquiry operation and for initiating the activation of the VPIC.
- C. VDEM will manage the VPIC operations.
- D. The Department of Motor Vehicles will provide facilities and equipment to operate the VPIC.
- E. Employees from selected state agencies will be invited to volunteer for staff positions in the VPIC.

**Concept of Operations**

- A. During normal operations:
  - 1. The VPIC Coordinating Committee will initiate review and update of policies and procedures.
  - 2. VDEM will establish points of contact with state agencies.

- 3. State agencies will recruit VPIC staff using a staff position profile provided by the Office of the Governor.
- 4. VDEM will provide training for VPIC staff.
- 5. VDEM maintains an updated roster of staff members and how to contact them.
- B. When a disaster is threatening, pending or has occurred, VDEM alerts state agencies participating in the VPIC regarding VPIC activation:
  - 1. VDEM determines threshold for activation of VPIC.
  - 2. VDEM leads in determining level of VPIC activation.
  - 3. VDEM prepares and implements VPIC staffing schedule.
  - 4. If additional VPIC staff is needed, VDEM will provide their training.
  - 5. VDEM will determine if VPIC backup site will be activated.
- C. In time of emergency:
  - 1. VDEM initiates activation of VPIC through DMV.
  - 2. VDEM contacts VPIC staff members about activation schedule.
  - 3. VDEM contacts other state agencies whose presence is needed at the VPIC or if a representative of an agency needs to be available to respond to inquiries.

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4. VDEM provides official, verified and releasable information for VPIC staff to respond to inquiries.
5. VPIC staff will maintain a record of inquiries, responses and actions.
6. VPIC staff will identify rumor control personnel who will be designated to identify rumors and misinformation and bring those to the attention of the Public Affairs Officer on duty.
7. VPIC staff will refer calls as appropriate to various local, state, federal, volunteer and private sector agencies.
8. VDEM leads in determining if VPIC level of activation needs to be increased or decreased.
9. VDEM coordinates with VPIC Committee and the Governor's Office to determine timeline for de-activating VPIC.

**D. After Activation**

1. VDEM leads evaluation of operation.
2. VDEM leads analyses of inquiries and actions taken.
3. VDEM provides analyzed data to interested parties or agencies.
4. VDEM may assist in determining if a thank you to citizens who volunteered to donate goods or services is appropriate.

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**VPIC Action Checklist**

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**1. Routine Operations**

- A. Establish VPIC Coordinating Committee
  - 1) Develop and maintain support agreements and liaison arrangements with other state agencies.
  - 2) Keep Committee informed of pending situations that may warrant activation of the VPIC.
- B. Develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) to carry out the VPIC function.
- C. Maintain current lists of state employees trained to staff VPIC.
- D. Develop and conduct training for VPIC staff.
- E. Maintain updated information about DMV equipment and facility capabilities.

**2. Increased Readiness**

A situation has occurred or is developing that may impact the public. There may be a threat or the perception of a threat to public safety.

- A. VDEM will monitor developing situation.
- B. Alert VPIC Coordinating Committee on the potential for activation of VPIC.
- C. Designate program manager and site managers to staff VPIC.
- D. Update or develop informational materials to address threatening situation.
- E. Confirm availability of VPIC staff.

**3. Response Operations**

Public interest in a situation is very high. There is a need to provide specific information about the event or the threat to the public to reduce danger or fear.

- A. Mobilization Phase

VDEM determines that the VPIC should be activated.

  - 1) Coordinate with Public Affairs Office to develop message to the public that information about the situation is available at the VPIC.
  - 2) Coordinate with DMV for access to facility.
  - 3) Prepare staffing schedule and contact VPIC staff.
  - 4) Confirm that VPIC staff knows how to access entry to DMV during and after hours.
  - 5) Designate someone to review previous VPIC training with activated staff.
  - 6) Publish VPIC telephone number.
  - 7) Determine if current computer program or manual setup will capture needed inquiry information.

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**B. Emergency Phase**

VPIC is operational.

- 1) Establish VPIC at DMV with staff from state agencies.
- 2) Monitor operation.
- 3) Analyze inquiries and adjust information and/or procedures to meet needs.
- 4) If additional VPIC staff is needed, designate a trainer.

**4. Recovery Operations**

Crisis is over; level of danger is minimal; request for information reduced.

**A. Deactivate VPIC.**

- 1) Inform VPIC staff.
- 2) Inform DMV.

**B. Analyze call activity and service provided.**

**C. Evaluate policies and procedures.**

**D. Evaluate facilities and equipment.**

**E. If appropriate, provide a thank you via phone call or mail to citizens who offered to volunteer their service or goods.**

**F. Distribute analyzed data to interested people or agencies.**

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